

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

EXERCISE AND THE WILL

THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

THE TECHNIQUE OF LIVING

MEDICINE AND DUTY

TWO WHITE ARMS (*a play*)

INTERFERENCE (*a play, with Roland Pertwee*)

THE FLAMING SWORD

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HAROLD DEARDEN

*He placed at the East of the Garden of Eden . . . a
Flaming Sword . . . to keep the way of the Tree of Life*



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.

First Published 1919

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE LONDON AND NORWICH PRESS, LIMITED, ST CULDS WORKS, NORWICH.

CHARACTERS
In order of appearance.

SUTTON, *a Valet.*

GRACE OSBORNE, *a Hospital Nurse.*

DR. ANDREW LEAVITT.

LADY BRABAZON.

MAJOR RICHARD HYDE, D.S.O.

SIR JAMES BRABAZON, BART.

MR. MEADOWS, *a Solicitor.*

SCENES.

ACT I.—A SITTING-ROOM IN SIR JAMES BRABAZON'S HOUSE
IN DEVONSHIRE.

ACT II.—SIR JAMES BRABAZON'S BEDROOM.

ACT III.—SAME AS ACT I.

TIME.—THE PRESENT

THE FLAMING SWORD

ACT I.

SCENE.—*Sir James Brabazon's sitting-room in his house in Devonshire. It is a large room, lined with books, like a study, and richly and comfortably furnished. There is a door R. leading to the hall, a large open fireplace L., and between the door and fireplace is a sweeping bow window, having French doors opening to the ground, through which a view of the sea can be obtained. There is yet another door C. leading to Sir James's bedroom. This is a double door, the outer covered with baize, and closing with a spring. When this door is opened a view is obtained of the right side of his bed, the head being to the back of the sitting-room, and beside the bed is a bed-table, with a reading lamp on it.*

TIME.—*Is morning and the sun is flooding the room.*

The stage is empty on Rise of Curtain and the bedroom doors are shut.

Enter SUTTON, a valet. He is a small, kindly, gentle person, very quiet in his manner and very much given to seeing more in a glance than is usual. He has a great sense of quiet humour, which his calling has done its best to stifle; but it still remains in traces, causing him to make the quaintest comments with an air of the most pontifical seriousness. He walks to the table, which is laid for breakfast, puts various letters down by the various plates, and then knocks on the inner bedroom door. He enters the bedroom, closing the doors behind him. Almost immediately, GRACE OSBORNE enters by door R. She is

THE FLAMING SWORD

dressed in nurse's costume. She is about twenty-five, and pretty, but there is a nervousness and listlessness in her manner which speaks of something wrong. She goes to the mirror over the fireplace and scrutinises her face intently, presses her hands to her eyes, and turns towards the window to stare out over the lawn. As she is standing there SUTTON reappears from the bedroom, carrying a breakfast tray. Hampered with the tray, he lets the door slam, and NURSE ORBORNE turns with a start.

NURSE Do be careful, Sutton. Surely you know how to close a door!

SUTTON. I'm sorry, Nurse, the wind caught it.

NURSE That's no excuse. It's disgraceful.

SUTTON [*quite good-tempered*] Well, I've caught it now, haven't I?

NURSE Sir James hates it.

SUTTON Sir James will no doubt say so in that case.

NURSE I'm saying so for him.

SUTTON The one good deed?

NURSE And please don't be impertinent.

SUTTON *bows*

[*Ignoring him*] Is Sir James ready for me?

SUTTON I believed so when I left him, but I'm not so sure now.

Exit NURSE coldly to the bedroom, while SUTTON turns to hall door. As he goes he meets DOCTOR ANDREW LEAVITT, who enters. DR. LEAVITT is a young man about twenty-five. He is handsome in a feeble sort of way, and obviously enjoys drawing SUTTON out. He is dressed in a very smart lounge suit.

DOCTOR Hello, Sutton! What a topping day!

SUTTON I thought so myself, sir, when I first got up. I've noticed a slight bite in the air since.

DOCTOR. Oho! Sir James a bit . . . ?

SUTTON [*who has a great tolerance for women*]. Nurse Osborne is very helpful this morning, sir.

DOCTOR. What's she been doing?

SUTTON. Nothing, sir—for too long, I should imagine.

DOCTOR. What happened?

SUTTON. She flattered me, sir, by expecting me to dodge about with a tray in both hands, and control the wind and weather at the same time. Not being an octopus, I find it beyond me.

DOCTOR. That's just her way. She's very fond of you really.

SUTTON. No doubt of it, sir. My own wife couldn't have ticked me off better.

DOCTOR. By the by, how is your wife?

SUTTON. Very well, sir, thank you, considering.

DOCTOR. And the baby?

SUTTON. Miraculous, sir. My wife is bottling him at the end of this month.

DOCTOR. She's what?

SUTTON. Bottling him, sir. It was her own expression. I don't pretend to understand these things myself.

DOCTOR. Oh! I understand. Well, that's fine. I suppose she'll be coming back soon, then?

SUTTON. As soon as I can find a cottage, sir. They're very hard to come by.

DOCTOR. Really?

SUTTON. It's these week-enders, sir. They're the trouble. They don't mind what they pay—or what they buy either, it seems to me. There's a lot more butlers than drains in most villages nowadays.

DOCTOR. That's very bad luck. You must miss your wife?

SUTTON. We all do, sir—it's most unfortunate. These temporary cooks are all very well, but things haven't really been the same since she left. I've often told her if I'd known there was to be all this bother I'd never have married at all.

DOCTOR. Oh, come, now!

SUTTON. It's a fact, sir. It seems so selfish to me—upsetting everybody for a little thing like that.

DOCTOR. I'll bet your wife doesn't agree with you?

SUTTON. Women are, of course, different, sir. Marriage, as you might say, is a hobby with a man, but it means a lot to a woman.

DOCTOR. I should jolly well hope it did.

SUTTON. It's the competition that does it, sir, in my opinion. It's the fashion among women to have a husband. Like these strings of pearls they're wearing now—they've all got to have one somehow or other.

DOCTOR. Even if they're Teclas!

SUTTON. You've said it, sir. That's what keeps a woman as often as not from running away from him afterwards. She's ashamed to let on that he is a Tecla, in my opinion.

DOCTOR. Well, if it is a fashion, as you say, it's lasted a devilish long time.

SUTTON. There's no denying that, sir. It's a bit of a mystery, you see, to most women—or used to be before the unmarried ones started writing books about it.

DOCTOR. But, after all, it's the sex instinct that's at the bottom of it, isn't it?

SUTTON. I daresay, sir. I hear some foreign gentleman says it's at the bottom of everything.

DOCTOR. Quite right—it's made him famous.

SUTTON. That's a pity now, isn't it? I've felt that way

myself, when I was a young man. I used to sweat it out of me by taking the dog for a walk.

DOCTOR. But one day you took Mrs. Sutton instead ?

SUTTON. Oh no, sir. I proposed to her, as you might say, in her kitchen, as a matter of fact. There's no sex stuff in Mrs. Sutton's kitchen, I give you my word.

DOCTOR. Well, anyway, it's rotten luck you've got to turn out. Can't Lady Brabazon get you something ?

SUTTON. The Major is doing all he can, I'm sure, sir. I haven't spoken to her ladyship—she's troubles enough of her own as it is.

DOCTOR. Poor Sir James—it's a real tragedy for both of them.

SUTTON. You've said it, sir. It's two years ago now, but I remember it as though it was yesterday. And them only married a year, too, when it happened.

DOCTOR. It was a marvel he wasn't killed—his horse rolling on him like that.

SUTTON. It nearly killed her ladyship, the shock did. She's never hunted since.

DOCTOR. Damned bad luck. She's wonderfully brave about it.

SUTTON. Her ladyship never lacked courage, sir. I've known her since she was a girl ; she comes from these parts, and a pretty wild stock they are, too. Before this happened nothing could stop her. Like a flame she was. She's tamed now right enough, and no mistake.

DOCTOR. They're a Devonshire family, then, are they ?

SUTTON. Well, they're Cornish by rights, sir, though some say they came from Spain originally.

DOCTOR. I daresay. With the Armada, probably. There's a lot of Spanish blood in Cornwall.

SUTTON. Indeed, sir.

DOCTOR. You've been here a long time, then, Sutton ?

SUTTON. I was born here, sir—at the Lodge, the same year as the master. Many's the trout we've tickled together. This was a happy house, sir, before this trouble came.

DOCTOR. Oh, well—troubles don't last for ever, you know. I'll bet you'll find your cottage sooner or later.

SUTTON. Probably later, I should think, sir.

DOCTOR. Everything comes to those who wait, you know.

SUTTON. I find that hard to believe, sir, with all these spinsters about.

Enter NURSE from bedroom

Hello! the sun's come out again. [*He begins to walk very solemnly towards the door*]

DOCTOR. Good morning, Nurse.

NURSE. Good morning. [*Glancing at SUTTON*] Talking, as usual! You and Sutton are like a pair of old women. I don't know what you find to talk about.

DOCTOR [*laughing*]. I don't know, either. What were we talking about, Sutton?

SUTTON [*from door, with a meaning glance at NURSE OSBORNE*]. We were speaking, if you recollect, sir, of—er—waiters, I think.

Exit SUTTON. As soon as SUTTON has gone,

DOCTOR LEAVITT goes over to NURSE OSBORNE and kisses her. She accepts his kiss impassively.

DOCTOR. I got your note. Have the others gone for their bathe?

NURSE. Yes, I said I had a cold.

DOCTOR. What's the matter? Your note sounded so mysterious. [*He takes a cigarette from the box on the table, and is evidently quite at peace with the world*].

NURSE. I want to talk to you about something, Andrew. I'm terribly worried.

DOCTOR. Has anything gone wrong?

NURSE [*drily*]. It has rather.

DOCTOR [*nodding towards bedroom*]. You don't mean he's found out—about us?

NURSE. Oh, no. That's all right.

DOCTOR. Good Lord! You fairly put the wind up me.

NURSE. Would you mind very much if he did find out?

DOCTOR. Would I mind! My dear old girl, it would lose us our job, that's all. Would I mind?

NURSE. There's no harm in being in love. I don't see why he should turn us out if he knew.

DOCTOR. It's not a matter of harm. But we're here on business—both of us.

NURSE. We could still go on with our business.

DOCTOR. Now look here, Grace, we've been all over this before, you know. This is a damned good job—very little to do, about twice the usual fee and all ex's paid—for both of us. If he knew we were engaged he might start looking for someone else, and he'd pretty soon find 'em, believe me;

NURSE. I don't see why he should mind.

DOCTOR. Well, when people are engaged they usually marry, don't they? Of course, he'd look for someone else. Anyway, I don't want to risk it.

NURSE. We can't go on here for ever.

DOCTOR. No need to. He won't, for one thing. Two or three years, perhaps—that's all. And when he pegs out he's left me enough to buy a practice. Told me so himself. He's left you something, too, you know that.

NURSE. You say yourself that mayn't happen for years.

DOCTOR. Perhaps not. But meantime I'm saving money here. First time in my life I've ever saved a bob—and as soon as I've enough to buy a practice we can kiss our hands to the old gentleman and float gracefully away. But we've got to hold this job down till I'm ready.

NURSE. I mayn't be able t

DOCTOR Don't be silly.

NURSE. I can't—much longer

He looks at her quickly and she looks steadily back at him

DOCTOR You don't mean . . . ?

She nods her head

Oh! My God!

NURSE I'm sorry, Andrew

DOCTOR That's just my luck Absolutely! How long have you known?

NURSE Not long—for certain

DOCTOR [*turning away wearily*] Of course, that simply puts the lid on it I don't know what the devil to do.

NURSE I'm trusting you, Andrew

DOCTOR Good Lord! and I trusted you—to take care of yourself properly It's so damned silly, people like us

NURSE You needn't tell me that If I'd taken care of myself properly, as you call it, I'd have made you marry me first

DOCTOR That's not a very nice thing to say, Grace There's no need to make me

NURSE I know that I didn't mean to be nasty, Andrew—I've just panicked a bit, that's all

DOCTOR I know, old thing It's rotten bad luck on both of us Just when everything is going so splendidly, too

NURSE [*crying just a little*] I'm so sorry, Andrew You do believe that, don't you?

DOCTOR [*taking her in his arms*] Of course I do It's just bad luck, that's all You poor dear There now Don't cry any more

NURSE Oh, Andrew, you're so good to me I do love you so

DOCTOR. That's fine.

NURSE. You're not angry ?

DOCTOR. Of course I'm not angry.

NURSE. I didn't know how to tell you. I was simply terrified. I didn't know what to do.

DOCTOR. I don't either. But we'll get out of it somehow, you'll see—though I'm dashed if I know how to go about it.

NURSE. What do you mean ?

DOCTOR. Well—you know ; I'm damned sorry, but there's no help for it, is there ?

NURSE. Andrew !

DOCTOR. My dear old thing, we've got to face facts. You don't want to go on with it, do you ?

NURSE. I'm not going to stop it, if that's what you mean.

DOCTOR. Now look here, Grace, we've got to be sensible. We're in a devil of a mess, you know, and we've got to get out of it as best we can.

NURSE. I'm not going to get out of it that way. It's hateful !

DOCTOR. I know. I hate having to talk about it.

NURSE. And I thought you were being so splendid.

DOCTOR. I don't know about being splendid, but it's no use bluffing ourselves, is it ? Something's got to be done.

NURSE [*breaking away from him and standing by herself*]. Oh, it's awful. I feel like a thing in a trap. And it ought to be all so different.

DOCTOR [*going over to her again*]. I know it's beastly. I'm terribly sorry, Grace.

NURSE. I wish I were dead.

DOCTOR. Now don't talk like that, Grace. Come on, cheer up. You'll feel different when it's all over.

NURSE [*turning round to him, speaking now in a very cold and firm voice*] I won't do it, Andrew.

He starts to speak, but she stops him

It's no use, I won't I know what it means—it's bad enough as it is, without that Besides, why should I? I've done no harm. It's no crime to have a baby, or if it is it shouldn't be

DOCTOR Of course it isn't a crime, but you know what people think

NURSE Oh, I know that That's what drives people who've done nothing wrong into doing wrong to get out of it.

DOCTOR Well, it's no use complaining There it is, isn't it?

NURSE I don't care I won't do it—I simply couldn't I don't know how you can speak of such a thing I should never feel clean again

DOCTOR Oh, all right then. I give it up, that's all. I wish to God we'd never started

NURSE You're not the only one who wishes that [*There is a pause*] Andrew!

DOCTOR [*very wearily*] Yes?

NURSE I've been waiting for you to say something. You haven't said it yet

DOCTOR What haven't I said?

NURSE When can we get married?

DOCTOR For heaven's sake, give me time to think. I don't know what the devil to do!

NURSE [*very quietly and firmly*] Look here, Andrew, I'm not going to be played with I can take care of myself, you know I've always had to, and I mean to now, if I must

DOCTOR What the devil do you mean by that? You talk as though I were a blackguard.

NURSE I know you, Andrew, better than you know

yourself, perhaps. You're weak. You mean well, but you don't always live up to it.

DOCTOR. Thanks very much. You needn't worry. I'll do my share all right.

NURSE. When ? Soon ?

DOCTOR. As soon as ever I can. If I had the cash I'd do it to-morrow. We'll have to get you away, of course—I'll think of something, but, damn it all, I must have time.

NURSE. Why not tell them. I'm not ashamed.

DOCTOR. Tell them ! You must be mad.

NURSE. Better tell them than risk them finding out. I can't go on like this—it's awful.

DOCTOR [*walking about in his agitation*]. It's pretty awful, anyway. There's only one hope as far as I can see. We'll be simply waiting for him to die now.

NURSE. That's like you. You'd be glad if he died to-morrow, you've practically said so. But you pretend to yourself all the time. I don't. I'm sorry for him, but I'm a great deal sorrier for myself. I wish to God he were dead, if that would make any difference. I've wished I were dead myself this last few days.

DOCTOR. It's no use talking nonsense like that.

NURSE. Then let's talk sense ; when are you going to marry me ?

DOCTOR. Now look here, Grace, I've had about enough. We're in a devil of a hole, both of us, and all you can do is to tell me you don't trust me. I'll not be bullied into things, so you may as well know it.

NURSE. You want to wait—till he's dead ?

DOCTOR. I don't want to. I've got to. What the devil can I do ? I haven't a penny of my own. If I married you now I couldn't keep you. It would mean sweating away at "locums" all over the place, while you lived in rooms somewhere. I don't want to be unkind, Grace, but I couldn't stick that—not after this, especially.

NURSE. You could stay on here.

DOCTOR. And what about you?

NURSE I wouldn't mind waiting—if we were married.

There is a pause while the Doctor fidgets about, clearly trying to get out of a difficult situation

DOCTOR It wouldn't work, Grace You wouldn't stick it for one thing—couldn't expect you to And I'd feel all tied up and worried—just when I ought to be free and getting on It'd be hopeless. You must see what it would mean.

NURSE I don't care what it means, you've got to marry me, Andrew I'm not afraid of living in cheap rooms, I've done it before—I'm quite a good housekeeper—it wouldn't be as bad as you think.

She waits for him to answer, but he continues to pace irritably up and down

I hate having to talk like this, Andrew—I've always stood on my own feet—I've never wanted to marry anybody—and it's hateful marrying like this, anyway It spoils everything, I see that now—to do what we've done. If women only knew how it does spoil things they'd never be such fools But I can't have a baby—I won't have a baby—before I'm married I know what it means and I tell you I won't do it I don't care what happens, but you've got to marry me—soon, or I'll speak to Lady Brabazon myself So now you know

DOCTOR [*stopping with a jerk, and speaking very coldly and brutally*] Will you? Well, that simply shows I've got to take care of myself as well as you Now listen, Grace, I'm quite prepared to marry you—when I can—but not before That's not being unkind—it's simply common sense Till I get this money of Sir James's I can't do a thing—so you've just got to be sensible

NURSE And I tell you I can't wait Besides, if I do wait, you won't marry me at all. I know that

DOCTOR. You've a pretty nice opinion of me, haven't you ?

NURSE. Men are all the same—they only marry for one thing. They mayn't know it, but it's true. There's a big difference between wanting to marry someone, and just knowing you ought to.

DOCTOR. Well, we'll see.

NURSE [*going to him, appealingly*]. Andrew !

Voices are heard on the lawn.

DOCTOR. Look out, for heaven's sake ! Don't let them see you like this !

Enter LADY BRABAZON, followed by MAJOR RICHARD HYDE. She is a beautiful woman, about the same age as NURSE OSBORNE, and very similar in height and build. MAJOR HYDE is about forty, tall, bronzed and handsome. He is laughing and is obviously in high spirits. He is dressed in grey flannel trousers, soft shirt, tweed jacket and scarf. LADY BRABAZON is radiant.

LADY B. What a heavenly morning. What happened to you, Doctor ?

MAJOR [*putting a heap of towels, etc., down by the window*]. You missed a wonderful bathe, you slacker. Any excuse ?

DOCTOR. Lumbago ! Stayed in too long yesterday, I think.

NURSE. So did I. I've a streaming cold this morning.

LADY B. Poor invalids. On a day like this, too. Richard, after breakfast I must ride. What are you doing ?

MAJOR. Working.

LADY B. [*mocking his tone*]. Wer-wer ! Indoors ?

MAJOR. I've got to ride over to the farm, to . . .

LADY B. Splendid. I'll come too. [*She throws her arms*

out in a gesture of ecstasy and laughs] I want to smell the air—and eat it

MAJOR Talking of eating, how about breakfast ?

LADY B. *(laughing)* What a mind ! *(To the Doctor)* Is your patient up ?

DOCTOR He's had his breakfast Sutton's just been in.

The bedroom door opens and SIR JAMES BRABAZON enters He is dressed, except for his jacket, and is wearing a silk dressing-gown He is older than the MAJOR, probably fifty, and is emaciated and of a dead white colour He walks slowly, but is cheerful, none the less, and only now and again does a spasm of pain cross his face He drags his feet and legs, and he uses two crutches always

LADY B Here he is ! *(Crossing to him)* Good morning, James *(They shake hands)*

SIR J Good morning, Phil

LADY B Did you have a good night ?

SIR J *(cheerfully)* Damnable, thanks *(To Doctor)* That dope of yours doesn't seem to act now I spend half my nights walking around here

DOCTOR I'll have to increase the dose a bit

SIR J. Why not leave the bottle and let me help myself ? It's so inhospitable dealing out rations like that

DOCTOR You must ask Nurse She keeps the bottle I only order it

SIR J Pretty poor hostess, that's all I can say *(To MAJOR)* Morning, Dick Have a good bathe, everybody ?

MAJOR Fine, old man Water like champagne

LADY B These two poor things *(nodding to Doctor and Nurse)* missed it Nurse has a cold and Doctor Leavitt's got lumbago, he says

SIR J Poor nurse ! No doctor can help you. Your trouble's a matter of time

NURSE [*arranging light rug over SIR JAMES's knees as he sits in chair by table*]. That's true. It's a matter of time.

Exit NURSE to bedroom, followed by DOCTOR.

SIR J. There's not much the matter with you two, anyway, you do me good to look at.

LADY B. Richard went quite mad this morning. I'm sure he swam halfway to France. [*Enter SUTTON.*] Breakfast, please, Sutton. [*To the others*] I'm famishing.

SUTTON. Immediately, my lady. [*Exit SUTTON.*]

SIR J. Time was when I could splash about a bit, too, before that damned horse rolled on me. D'you remember, Dick?

MAJOR. You could make rings round me—always, at everything.

LADY B. Now, Richard, I forbid it. Your hero-worship would turn anybody's head.

MAJOR. It's gone on for thirty years. Started when I was his fag at Eton. I'm too old to change now.

SIR J. It seems perfectly natural to me!

LADY B. I daresay, but it's bad for you. He should pretend he's got over it, at any rate.

SIR J. Dick can't pretend anything. He's too stupid—God bless him!

SUTTON has brought in breakfast. The MAJOR and

LADY BRABAZON help themselves while talking.

MAJOR. Thanks very much. Coffee, Phil?

LADY B. Please. [*To SIR JAMES*] I hope he's not too stupid to pour it out.

SIR J. Oh, he's all right at doing things—thinking 'em is what worries him, isn't it, Dick?

MAJOR. Don't be an ass, Jim.

LADY B. That's better; we'll have more of that, please.

SIR J. The privilege of being called an ass by my agent

is entirely due to the fact I have just stated. I don't regret it, but there it is

MAJOR. Try this ham. You won't regret that either

SIR J As I was saying, I make a plain statement of fact, in my own home, before my own womanfolk—what is the singular of "folk," by the way?—and this hireling of mine calls me an ass. He replied to the Foreign Office in identical terms in his capacity of District Commissioner some three years ago. They didn't appreciate the privilege, as I do—fortunately for me

LADY B Fortunately for all of us

MAJOR [*with his mouth full of ham*] Same here

LADY B The conceit of this man is awful!

MAJOR More coffee?

LADY B Please [*He gets up to pour it*] What did happen really, Richard—about the Foreign Office, I mean?

MAJOR Oh, I dunno. There was a bit of trouble in my district—some bright nigger-loving fellow kicked up a row in the House—and they just unloaded me—like that! [*Tips the bread off his plate*]

LADY B How disgraceful!

SIR J The fact is that our thick-headed friend here was stupid enough to stand by one of his underlings instead of stepping gracefully aside in the time-honoured manner when that underling was in process of being unloaded.

MAJOR He was a damned good fellow, that's why

LADY B What had he done?

MAJOR He'd done his job. He'd hanged a few niggers who needed hanging, and if you're five hundred miles up country you're a bit inclined to forget what a trial at home looks like. The main thing is to hang 'em, and get on making friends with them.

SIR J You find that the best way?

MAJOR It's the way they understand

SIR J. The nigger-loving M.P. didn't, anyway.

MAJOR. Oh, him! I expect the only niggers he knows take his wife to the Embassy.

LADY B. But why did they unload you, as you call it?

MAJOR. I said if my officer was sacked I'd go too—so I went.

LADY B. I can see you saying it.

SIR J. Fine code, loyalty to your friends. Like all other codes, the great idea is to save thinking. Right's right—whatever the circumstances. It isn't, of course, but fellows like Dick can't be bothered with details.

LADY B. It's a pity everyone isn't so stupid.

SIR J. If you mean the F.O., they're well up to Dick's form. It's a different type of stupidity, that's all.

LADY B. I like a man who knows his own mind.

SIR J. Every woman loves a bully. She likes him to call with a club in his hand.

LADY B. It's a good thing she does if she's ever going to marry him.

SIR J. When he's married he no longer calls with it—he goes to it instead as a place of refuge.

LADY B. Not one of the best of jokes.

SIR J. The best jokes aren't told at all, my dear, they're lived.

MAJOR. My opinion, any joke at breakfast is a bad 'un.

SIR J. You started it yourself.

MAJOR. I did?

SIR J. You and the Foreign Office—could anything be more comic?

MAJOR. I didn't laugh much at the time, myself.

LADY B. Apparently you didn't do anything at the time

MAJOR. Oh, yes, I did. I cursed a good deal.

LADY B But couldn't you have explained . . . got out of it somehow ?

MAJOR You can't explain facts All you can do is to take what's coming

LADY B. I call that a horrible theory.

SIR J Most women would

LADY B But it's so stupid—folding your hands and saying "Kismet" like that. I've no patience with it.

SIR J That's right, Phil—tell him what you'd have done. Box of chocolates to the Prime Minister ?

MAJOR. Love and kisses from Uncle Dick.

The two men laugh, but LADY BRABAZON is a trifle irritated

LADY B I don't call that at all funny When you two get together you're just like a pair of schoolboys

The two men hold their hands up, the MAJOR waving a napkin, and she has to end up with a smile.

Great gabies ! No wonder people get the better of you.

MAJOR. But look here, Phil, I couldn't let my man down, it isn't done, you know

LADY B [*mock seriously*] Oh, of course, if it isn't done that's the end of it No matter what the trouble is you mustn't lift a finger to help yourself if it isn't done That would be too dreadful.

MAJOR Now you're pulling my leg

LADY B Well—you were thousands of miles away—stupid, couldn't you explain ?

MAJOR But I told you we had hanged these fellows—about fourteen of 'em—I couldn't explain that.

SIR J [*looking at LADY BRABAZON, with mock pity*] The poor fellow doesn't understand

MAJOR Well, I don't see .

SIR J. My dear Dick, when a lady tells you she's going

to explain, what she means is that she proposes to give you a detailed and convincing account of what never took place at all.

MAJOR [*after a pause*]. I call that lying.

SIR J. [*to LADY BRABAZON*]. Now isn't that extraordinary?

LADY B. I suppose that isn't done, either?

MAJOR. Oh, isn't it? I've seen a few try it in my time.

SIR J. Nothing misses you, Dick.

LADY B. But not by you, I suppose?

MAJOR. I don't think it pays, that's why. You can't lie your way through life. It's too big for you. If you try to it'll beat you—every time.

LADY B. I hope your friend appreciated your loyalty?

MAJOR. Never asked him. Never saw him again, as a matter of fact. Dashed good fellow, though.

LADY B. He sounds delightful.

SIR J. Well, it gave you back to me, as the song says. But for that I might never have known I was an ass. And this man was my fag once.

LADY B. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings. . . .

MAJOR [*going to SIR JAMES and putting his hand on his shoulder*]. It gave me two of the best friends a man ever had, anyway. If I met that M.P. I'd stand him a drink.

Enter DOCTOR LEAVITT.

DOCTOR. We're ready for you now, Sir James, if you are.

SIR J. [*rising*]. I'm waiting; I've been waiting for the last two years. [*To LADY BRABAZON*] What are you doing this morning, Phil?

LADY B. Richard and I are riding over the farm; he's got something or other to do.

MAJOR. I'm going to have a look at that well they're sinking. I want it ready for next year's lambing.

SIR J Lucky devils! Get on with you

Exit to bedrooms with DOCTOR The MAJOR is filling his pipe

LADY B *[going to window and throwing her arms wide]*
What a heavenly day, it's a sin to be indoors

MAJOR Not when you've been outside as much as I have.

LADY B You talk as if you were a hundred

MAJOR *[staring at her, as he lights up]* And you look as though you were eighteen.

LADY B Hurrah! A compliment You're getting quite domesticated, Richard.

MAJOR *[embarrassed]* I don't care It's the truth.

LADY B How do you know, you never look at me?

MAJOR I'm always looking at you, I was looking at you this morning—diving You're marvellous!

LADY B Am I now! Fancy that!

MAJOR *[opening his paper]* Don't say I don't look at you, anyway

LADY B Well, go on. What else have you noticed?

MAJOR I say, do you see "Harbinger" is scratched?

LADY B No, I don't, and I don't care I want you to look at me—you may find something else to notice

The MAJOR does not reply

Look at me, when I tell you, and put that paper down!

The MAJOR still reads on

Richard!

He still reads

[Snatching paper] Of all the obstinate people! *[Folds paper up and puts it down on table]* Now will you obey me?

MAJOR *[smiling]* Give me that paper.

LADY B Look at me nicely first and then you shall have it

MAJOR. Give me that paper.

LADY B. Not until you've done as you're told.

The MAJOR gets quietly to his feet and goes over for the paper. She stands between him and it, and he has to move her to reach it. He does so, and she snatches at paper ; there is a struggle, and he concentrates more on subduing her than getting the paper. Suddenly she is limp in his arms, and he kissing her passionately. She returns his kisses with equal passion.

LADY B. Dick ! Dick !

Gradually he recovers control and puts her from him. He walks to window, she leaning against the table and watching him ; then he turns.

MAJOR. I'm sorry, Phil. I couldn't help it. What a cad you must think me !

LADY B. I'm not sorry. I wanted you to kiss me. I've always wanted you to kiss me.

MAJOR. Phil !

LADY B. I've lain awake and wondered what it would feel like to be kissed by you. Oh Dick ! I think I should have died if you hadn't !

MAJOR [*glancing towards bedroom*]. Hush ! for God's sake !

LADY B. Tell me you love me.

MAJOR. I never meant to.

LADY B. Tell me.

MAJOR. I thought we could just go on—as we were.

LADY B. Oh, Dick, I do love you.

MAJOR [*looking hungrily at her*]. By God ! that's wonderful. That'll be something to take away with me.

LADY B. What do you mean ?

MAJOR. I must clear out. Phil—that's all. I ought to be kicked out.

LADY B You mean you're going now—leaving me—after this? Oh, you couldn't! *[She puts her arms round him]*

He kisses her with abandoned passion, then he tears himself away and leaves her—suddenly

MAJOR I've got to go How the hell can I stay? Can't you see I'm just mad for you?

LADY B You're thinking of Jim?

MAJOR I've got to—we've both got to.

She makes a gesture of passionate resentment, and drops her head and weeps Then in a few moments she looks up, sees him standing staring obstinately through the window, and at once decides on her plan.

LADY B *[going close to him]* I'm sorry, Dick! *[He turns to her and she smiles]* I'm all right now

MAJOR Phil, what a mess it all is

LADY B It can't be helped, dear But we must do what's right, as you say We'll forget all this We'll just put it away as something that never can be

MAJOR By God—you're splendid!

LADY B You've made me so, if I am And it isn't easy, Dick,

MAJOR *[taking her hand]* Can you ever forgive me, Phil?

LADY B Why should I blame you for telling me you love me? I'm counting on that, now more than ever

MAJOR I'll do anything in the world for you

LADY B It's not for me, it's for him. We mustn't think of ourselves now

MAJOR What do you want me to do?

LADY B There's only one thing we can do, and you must stay here, Dick, to help me do it

MAJOR I couldn't stay here, Phil, not now

LADY B You must think of Jim, Dick; he doesn't get

much out of life, as you know, and what he does get we give him.

MAJOR. It's you who do that—not me.

LADY B. I can't do it alone. If I'm to help him—if I'm to have anything to give him—I must have help, too. I can't be giving all the time, and getting nothing out of life in return.

MAJOR. What would be the use of my staying now?

LADY B. We should be friends still—as we were before. That would be something. I should be satisfied with that. I could go on then, helping him to bear things and making this awful life a little less dreary than it is. You don't know what it was like before you came.

MAJOR. I know, it must have been damnable.

LADY B. You keep me from moping—it makes all the difference having you here. I don't want to fail him, Dick, but you mustn't fail him either.

MAJOR. I've done that pretty badly already.

LADY B. That's all over. We'll forget that—both of us. What we've got to do now is to make up for it. It's our duty, Dick; you can't—you mustn't—run away from it.

MAJOR [*sitting with his head in his hands*]. I don't know what the hell to do.

LADY BRABAZON *puts out a hand to touch him and then draws back.*

LADY B. I know it's hard, Dick, but it's the only way. We can't shirk things just because they're hard, you know.

There is a pause, while LADY BRABAZON watches him anxiously.

MAJOR [*suddenly*]. It's no good, Phil, we're simply bluffing ourselves. That's all we're doing, just bluffing ourselves. [*He gets to his feet and walks away.*]

LADY B. It's the truth, Dick—that's all it is. That's not bluffing ourselves.

MAJOR You're asking me to stay on as we were before .

LADY B To help Jim—and me

MAJOR I know, and I wish to God I could help you. But you're asking me to stay on and be just friends again, and I tell you I can't do it. I've got to go, Phil—it's no use pretending.

LADY B I tell you we could be friends. It's so foolish throwing everything away like that. I know I could, and so could you. I'd help you.

MAJOR [*looking straight at her*] Do you think I'd let you help me? Do you think I'd want you to? If I stayed here I'd take you, and nothing on God's earth could stop me.

LADY B [*hysterically*] Then why don't you? If you want me like that, why don't you? Do you think I want to stop you? Do you think I want you just to be my friend? Do you think I want to go on like this always—getting no love and no beauty out of life at all? You're going because I'm Jim's wife! If you only knew! His wife! I'm not a wife at all. I'm just a ghastly figure in a farce, and I can't go on with it. I can't! It isn't fair! I have tried and it's no use. I'm not a stone—I'm a woman—there are some things you can't kill—that shouldn't be killed. When you came, everything I'd tried so hard to smother ran to meet you. I'm starving, Dick. From the first day I saw you I knew that I was yours—yours to take when you wanted!

MAJOR Then what's the use of us trying to be friends?

LADY B It's not my doing. It's you who say you have to go.

MAJOR Because if I stayed I couldn't help myself.

LADY B I don't want you to. I don't want the friend, Dick, I want the lover.

MAJOR Phil—for God's sake—I can't stand it.

LADY B. That sounds shameless, doesn't it? Well, I am shameless, you've made me that.

MAJOR. I have?

LADY B. You're a better friend than a lover, Dick. But you'll not rob Jim by staying. I had to tell you that.

There is a pause.

MAJOR. It's no use, Phil. I'm not a saint, but we simply can't do that.

LADY B. Not even when I've told you?

MAJOR. If you were free—if it was anybody else—I'd let everything go to hell. But as it is I've got to clear out—now, for good.

LADY B. You mean you're never going to see me again?

MAJOR. I mean just that, Phil dear.

LADY BRABAZON *puts her head in her hands and sobs.*

God! What a mess it all is.

LADY B. And if anything happens—to Jim? I'm to be left alone—always?

MAJOR [*very tensely*]. You'd not be alone for long. You know that.

LADY B. Oh, I could scream. You talk as if it were all so easy. I don't believe you care a bit.

MAJOR. I wish to God you'd always thought so. [*He turns to the door.*]

LADY B. Where are you going?

MAJOR. I don't know. I'll ride out somewhere, I think—I shall burst if I stay here.

LADY B. [*bitterly*]. Go on then—go for your ride.

He turns and gets to the door.

Dick!

He turns again and she smiles at him.

Don't tease me any more Don't be unkind.

He hesitates for an instant and then makes up his mind.

MAJOR. I can't, Phil, it's no use—I can't!

He goes out quickly When he has gone, she stands a second looking after him, and then goes slowly up to the window and looks out and, as the beauty of the day reminds her of her earlier happiness, she beats in impotent resentment on the casement and goes hurriedly out In a few moments the bedroom door opens and NURSE OSBORNE appears She closes the door, walks to the table and picks up the paper, stares listlessly at it, and then, dropping it, puts her head on the table and weeps silently

CURTAIN

ACT II.

SCENE I.

SCENE.—*Sir James Brabazon's bedroom. The room is large, and, apart from the bed at centre back, is furnished more like a sitting-room than a bedroom. There is a desk with writing materials on near the right front, and the door leading to the sitting-room is on the right also, opposite the large fireplace, near which armchairs are placed. There is also another door on left back, which leads to a dressing and bath-room, leading to corridor outside. There is a bright wood fire burning, and the curtains are drawn and the lights lit.*

TIME.—*After dinner on same day as Act I.*

SIR JAMES is sitting by the fire in a wheel-chair, reading a book. He is in dinner things and his dressing-gown, with a light rug over his knees. Enter SUTTON, bearing a tray with whisky and soda, etc., on it.

SUTTON. Will you have the tray in here, sir, or in the other room?

SIR J. In here, I think. [SUTTON puts down tray.] Has her ladyship taken any dinner, Sutton?

SUTTON. I believe so, Sir James. She sent a message to say she feels much better, and will be down shortly.

SIR J. Good! Bring some more logs, will you? I shall stay in here now. These damned pains have started again. I shan't get much sleep, I fancy.

SUTTON. That's terrible, Sir James. Can't the Doctor do something?

SIR J. He's doing his best, I expect. I live on knock-out drops these days

SUTTON has been arranging the rug over SIR JAMES'S knees. The DOCTOR and MAJOR HYDE enter as SUTTON is doing so. They are smoking. Exit SUTTON.

MAJOR [*lighting cigar*] You're sure you don't mind these Jim?

SIR J. Not a bit. I'd join you myself if I could. But a cigar these days tastes to me like the leg of a cane chair. That's your work, I suppose, Doctor?

DOCTOR. It's these sleeping draughts, Sir James. They all do that, I'm afraid.

SIR J. That's all they do, it seems to me.

MAJOR. Seen Phil yet, Jim?

SIR J. No. [*To Doctor*] Is Lady Brabazon down yet?

DOCTOR. She's dressing now, I think. I've just left her. She's quite all right again, I'm glad to say.

SIR J. Quite a busy practice you're getting. Nothing he can do for you, Dick, I suppose?

MAJOR. God forbid!

SIR J. Still taking nourishment, eh?

The MAJOR grins

DOCTOR. I'm afraid Major Hyde doesn't like my profession.

MAJOR. Oh, yes, I do. Very good-hearted fellows, most of 'em I've known. But a damned sight too enterprising for my fancy.

DOCTOR. But that makes for progress, surely?

MAJOR. I daressay. But when I have a fellow up to his elbows in my innards I bet I'll think he's made enough progress to go on with.

DOCTOR. But we don't cut people up for fun.

SIR J. You certainly don't cut them up for nothing.

MAJOR. Once you let 'em inside you're done, seems to me. There's an old fellow at the Rag now—they ripped something out of him, sewed him up, and about six months after said they'd have to do it all over again. Seems this surgeon-feller had left his hat in 'im or something.

DOCTOR. Of course, accidents will happen. But I don't suppose they charged him for the second operation.

MAJOR. I should damn well hope they didn't. You ask old Withers—he'd have charged them a bit if he could.

SIR J. He was clearly entitled to a cloak-room fee, at any rate.

DOCTOR [*laughing*]. My poor profession. Everybody slates us when they're well, but they go to us fast enough when they're up against it.

MAJOR. So we do to money-lenders, and we're caught by the short hairs in both cases.

SIR J. Well, let me prescribe for both of you. [*Nods at tray of drinks.*]

MAJOR. Not just yet, old man, thanks.

DOCTOR. I've some letters I ought to finish, really, Sir James.

SIR J. Never mind. Have a drink before you go.

DOCTOR. I'll take it along, then. I'll hear your bell.

He mixes himself a drink and leaves, while the others are talking.

MAJOR. It's devilish hot in here, Jim. Don't you think so?

SIR J. Then take your coat off and be damned to you! It suits me, and as an invalid I claim the right to make everyone else uncomfortable.

MAJOR. Oh, I can stand it. I've been in hotter places in my time.

SIR J. And will be again later. Don't worry.

*The MAJOR goes over and pours himself a drink
He swallows it at one go* SIR JAMES watches him
with a half smile.

MAJOR [*drawing deep breath and showing some discomfort*] Phew!

SIR J What's the matter, old man? Soda flat, or something?

MAJOR [*guiltily*] No, it's all right I was just—[*He makes a gesture*—you know.

SIR J. You went for our young friend like a ternier
I never heard you so chatty

MAJOR He won't mind Nice lad He knew I was only
ragging

SIR J What have you been doing to-day?

MAJOR Just rode round the place I went as far as the
Cross, as a matter of fact

SIR J Over the moor? That's a devil of a distance
Did Phil go with you?

MAJOR No I went by myself I felt I needed a good
sweat I had a look at the well as I came back.

SIR J How are they getting on?

MAJOR Not so bad

SIR J Next year I hope we'll have a record lambing

*The MAJOR walks over restlessly to the window and
draws blind aside*

It should make all the difference to that side of the land.

MAJOR By Gad! That Start Light's bright to-night
It might be on your window-sill

*As he speaks a beam of light swings across his face
and shows up in the subdued lighting of the room,
flooding the side of the wall where the door is for a
moment, and then disappearing again*

SIR J It's a very good friend of mine—that old light-

house. I draw those curtains when I go to bed—it keeps me company.

There is a pause. The MAJOR still looks thoughtfully out of the window. SIR JAMES watches him, puzzled.

Have you got any more plans in your head ?

The MAJOR turns quickly, for he has had nothing but one plan in his head all day.

MAJOR. Eh ? As a matter of fact there is something I want to tell you.

SIR J. Go ahead. You'll ruin me yet with your plans, but never mind.

MAJOR. This one'll save you money I'm afraid.

SIR J. Marvellous ! Let's hear it.

MAJOR. I'm going, Jim. I've made up my mind to clear out.

SIR J. Clear out ? What the devil do you mean ?

MAJOR. I'm going abroad. I need a change. I'm getting soft here.

SIR J. [*touching his head*]. Here's where you're getting soft, old boy. You can't mean you want to leave us ?

MAJOR. I must, Jim. It's no use talking. I've made up my mind.

SIR J. Damn your mind ! What's the matter with the fellow ? Going to get married ?

MAJOR. No !

SIR J. Aren't you happy here ? Getting bored with us or something ?

MAJOR. Don't be an ass ! You're the only two people in the world I give a damn about. [*He walks across the room to the drinks, pushes the glasses about and stares down at the tray.*]

There is a pause. Suddenly SIR JAMES remembers.

SIR J All right, Dick I've got it. I ought to have seen it before.

MAJOR What do you mean ?

SIR J [smiling] Don't look so worried. How far have you gone ?

The MAJOR stares at him for a second or two and then comes deliberately over to him

MAJOR What do you mean when you say you know ?

SIR J You told me yourself just now—practically. Got you by the short hairs, have they ? Poor old fellow

A look of relief floods the MAJOR's face, and he turns away, but not before SIR JAMES has seen it. The MAJOR leans over the mantelpiece, back to SIR JAMES, who watches him as the truth dawns on him at last.

So I was wrong, was I ? It's not money ?

MAJOR [still staring at fire] I've told you I want a change Surely that's reason enough ?

There is a pause

SIR J Have you told Phil ?

MAJOR. This afternoon

SIR J What did she say ?

MAJOR. Oh, nothing There's nothing to say She was very kind, of course, like you.

SIR J Kind ! Why, I don't know what we'll do without you. This isn't a very cheerful life for a woman, Dick. It's not very cheerful for either of us, for that matter. Did she tell you what it'll be like for her without you about the place ?

MAJOR [holding himself down with both hands] She said she'd miss me, of course We've been great friends—all of us

There is a pause.

SIR J When did you make up your mind about this ?

MAJOR. I've been thinking I ought to go for some time now.

SIR J. But only this morning you were talking about next year. You weren't thinking of going then.

The MAJOR does not answer.

Has anything happened since then?

The MAJOR is still silent.

Come on, old man, out with it. I'm not a fool, you know. Let's talk it over. I'll do anything to keep you—if I can.

MAJOR. Oh, damn it all, Jim! Leave me alone. I've made up my mind to go, and that's all there is to it.

SIR J. All right. I didn't mean to be a nuisance. Perhaps it's best. We'll let it go at that.

MAJOR. Now you make me feel a cad. [*He goes to SIR JAMES and stands by him*] Look here, Jim, I'm not a fellow to gush much, but you've been the best pal to me ever a man had.

SIR J. My dear fellow . . .

MAJOR. Shut up a minute, and listen to me. You're the best friend I've got—or ever have had. Ever since I was a kid I—well, you know what I mean—that's a fact. You took me up, too, when I hadn't a fiver. Not a fiver! I owe everything I've got in the world to you, and I'm not such a mean cuss as not to know it. [*He pauses, ashamed of his own emotion.*] I don't want to make a song about it, but I'd do any damned thing in the world for you. I want you to know that, Jim, any damned thing. But I've got to get out of this place—quick; and you've got to believe me when I say so.

SIR JAMES knows now beyond all doubt.

SIR J. I see. Well, that's that.

There is a pause. SIR JAMES reviews the whole miserable situation and at length, half to himself, he says :

I'm damned sorry—for all of us

MAJOR We'll shake hands on that

They do so as LADY BRABAZON enters She guesses the MAJOR has spoken, and, womanlike, is instantly on her guard

LADY B Whatever are you two doing? You look terribly serious

SIR J *[watching her closely and anxious to know where she stands in all this]* Dick's just been telling me, Phil.

LADY B *[very innocently]* What?

SIR J What have you got to say?

LADY B I don't know what you're talking about

SIR J *[assuming she is ignorant of the state of affairs].* About him going He told me you knew

LADY B Oh, that! I think it's the stupidest thing I ever heard

MAJOR Couldn't we let it drop now?

LADY B That's what a man always says when he wants to do something absolutely unreasonable

MAJOR Well, it's no use talking about it I've made up my mind

LADY B Then the sooner you unmake it the better Jim, can't you talk to him?

SIR J We have been talking a good deal There's not much more to be said

LADY B I don't agree at all I think people owe something to their friends You can't just use them when it suits you, and then leave them stranded when it suits you, too

MAJOR You know I'm not doing that.

SIR J Of course we do *[To LADY BRABAZON]* Besides which, he's not leaving us stranded.

LADY B He is

MAJOR. Moggridge can carry on all right. He did it before I came, anyway.

LADY B. Moggridge isn't Jim's friend—or mine. You are—or you're supposed to be, at any rate.

SIR JAMES *looks at the MAJOR and smiles away the implication.*

Of course, Jim, if you want him to go there's nothing more to be said.

SIR J. I don't want him to go, but—from what he says—I think he's a very good reason for it.

LADY B. I think it's disgraceful.

SIR J. You don't understand, Phil.

LADY B. I do. It's just stupid obstinacy.

SIR J. If it is, you praised him for it this morning.

LADY B. I did ?

SIR J. You said you liked a man who knew his own mind.

LADY B. That was entirely different.

SIR J. Well, that's true, it hits us this time. But he's doing what he thinks right, and I'm inclined to agree with him.

LADY B. Oh, well, if he's bored with us, I'm sure I don't want to keep him. [*She turns away and stands angrily tapping her foot on the fender.*]

MAJOR. I'll see Moggridge first thing to-morrow.

SIR J. All right. When do you want to go ?

MAJOR. As soon as I can.

SIR J. Well, we'll fix that up in the morning.

MAJOR. I'll clear off now, I think. Good-night, Phil.

LADY BRABAZON *ignores him.*

Good-night, Jim. [*Shakes hands.*] See you in the morning.

SIR J. Good-night, old man.

Exit MAJOR HYDE.

Well, Phil, this is a miserable business, isn't it ?

LADY B I'm sure you could persuade him.

SIR J. I'm afraid I can't do that.

LADY B. Why not ? Do you want him to go ?

SIR J I think he's got to.

LADY B [*hysterically*]. Well, I don't, do you hear ? You can't just sit there and let him go like that. I'm wretched enough as it is

SIR J I didn't know you were wretched.

LADY B I didn't want you to know I'm not blaming you I've never complained before, but it was perfectly ghastly here before he came.

SIR J I see

LADY B You don't understand, Jim—you can't understand—but if he went now, I should simply hate it.

SIR J. I didn't know he meant as much as that.

LADY B. [*recovering*] Well, he's someone, Jim, isn't he ? That's all I mean You don't want me to get bored and irritable ?

SIR J Poor old Phil, indeed I don't And of course, I know he's brightened things up tremendously. He's done us both good. Great healthy devil—I've envied him many a time. I can't swim and ride and walk with you, Phil—worse luck. You're bound to miss him.

LADY B [*nestling to him*] Well, you see what I mean, don't you ?

SIR J Of course I do

LADY B You don't think me a pig for saying what I did—about being a little bored sometimes ?

SIR J I think you're an angel for not letting me see what a burden I am—before

LADY B [*putting her hand playfully over his mouth*] And you will make him stay, won't you ?

SIR J. I'm afraid that's impossible.

She draws away from him, and again stands with her back towards him. There is a pause.

Listen, Phil, you may as well know the truth. Dick's lost his head over you. That's why he's got to go.

LADY B. [*very quietly*]. Did he tell you so?

SIR J. Not in so many words—but practically. So now you know.

LADY B. There's no harm in that. I can take care of myself.

SIR J. I know that. But that's not the point, Phil. It would be an impossible situation for all of us.

LADY B. I don't see that at all.

SIR J. Do you think I could go on seeing you two together—always—and knowing he was in love with you? What do you think I'm made of?

LADY B. I might ask you that about myself. You're not thinking of me at all.

SIR J. I'm thinking of you as my wife.

LADY B. As your property, you mean?

SIR J. That's nonsense. I'm simply doing what's right for both of us.

LADY B. It's pure selfishness—that's all it is. I shall be perfectly wretched—cooped up here by myself—I know what it was like before.

SIR J. It's not my fault that you're cooped up, Phil.

LADY B. That's why I hate having to say this. But you make me. You don't know what my life has been this last three years.

SIR J. Two years, you mean—since this damned accident.

LADY B. That made it worse, of course.

SIR J. But before that we loved each other—surely you were happy?

LADY BRABAZON *does not answer.*

Phil!

She still does not answer

Didn't you love me?

LADY B [impatiently] Oh! I don't know.

SIR J But, good God! Why did you marry me then?

LADY B I was very, very fond of you, Jim And I knew you loved me. I think that's why most women get married

SIR J But you didn't love me?

LADY B I thought it was enough just to be fond of you. And so it was, at first

SIR J Why only at first?

She does not answer

Come on, Phil, we must have this out We've gone too far to stop now. What happened afterwards?

LADY B Afterwards it was different A woman marries a man she knows, but she must give herself to a stranger. And she may hate that stranger. I thought in time I'd get used to it—and wouldn't mind so much But instead of that something seemed to wake in me Something that I hated It terrified me It had nothing to do with love It it [She makes a gesture of hopelessness and cannot go on]

SIR J Go on—tell me—what was it?

LADY B Oh! what's the use . ?

SIR J We shall know that perhaps when we've heard it. What was this—this thing—which woke in you?

LADY B It was just a beast—a beast that had to be satisfied

SIR J By this stranger you hated?

LADY B I found out then that it wasn't enough to be fond of you I felt degraded

SIR J. But you knew what marriage was. You talk as though you'd had something extraordinary to put up with.

LADY B. No, I don't. [*Bitterly.*] I very soon found that out. Most of my friends seemed to be just putting up with this blessed sacrament.

SIR J. Then good God! why didn't you tell me? I'd have done anything. . . .

LADY B. What was the use? There was no escape, you see. I had just to be degraded—or tortured.

There is a pause.

SIR J. And I thought you were so happy. That's comic, isn't it?

LADY B. It's true. I was happy, in everything else. That's what's so cruel. A marriage can be worse than unhappy, Jim. It can be incomplete—deformed. It may be faultless, like ours was, apart from that one thing—and yet be intolerable.

SIR J. And I never guessed?

LADY B. I suppose no man could understand. But a woman would.

SIR J. Then all this [*indicating his helplessness*] was a godsend to you, really?

LADY B. I deserve that, I suppose?

SIR J. Well, it was, wasn't it?

LADY B. I only know I was sorry—so terribly sorry—for everything. I almost loved you at that time.

SIR J. It stopped one ghastly side of your life, anyway!

LADY B. That was the cruellest part of it for both of us, Jim. We know what it did for you, but have you ever thought what it did for me? It stopped my whole life as a woman—like that—and turned me into a nurse. I'm not made like that, I simply can't do it. I want to do things—have children—anything but just go on as the nurse of a man who is kind to me.

SIR J I'm kind, as you call it, because I love you. I suppose that doesn't count?

LADY B Oh, yes, it does. There are times when I almost hate you, just because of that.

SIR J Hate me?

LADY B It takes a really kind man to make a woman wretched. I knew I ought to love you, and I couldn't; I knew I was unfair, unjust, and I couldn't help it. I blamed myself—I hated myself—and sometimes I've hated you too. You awakened this beast in me, and it tortures me. I think sometimes I'll go out of my mind. I can't sleep; I spend my nights thinking, thinking the most dreadful things. I feel sometimes like a man must feel when his mistress refuses him.

SIR J You feel I've cheated you.

LADY B Life has cheated us both, Jim.

There is a pause.

SIR J Well, I don't know that I'm so much to blame, in spite of what you've told me.

LADY B. I never said you were to blame at all.

SIR J I'm a burden to you, that's clear, but then I'm a burden to myself. As for the rest—it's as bad for me as for you, you know. And what you've just told me is a bit of a facer.

LADY B I was a fool ever to have spoken of it. But you made me.

SIR J We may as well know where we stand. I only wonder you haven't left me.

LADY B How could I leave you? It isn't your fault; it's no one's fault. I know that. I try so hard to be fair, Jim. But I'm not big enough. I expect it often is like that. People try to do things that are too big for them, and in the end it's worse than if they'd never tried at all. I'll go on trying—but you must help me.

SIR J What do you want me to do?

LADY B. Let me have some outlet—a chance to breathe—to keep myself sane. You mustn't take everything from me, and expect me to live like a machine. I tell you I can't stand it.

SIR J. You mean Dick ?

LADY B. He's alive, like I am ; he takes me out of myself. I'll take care. I promise you I'll take care, but if he goes, I'm finished.

SIR JAMES *stares silently into the fire.*

It means everything to me, Jim—to both of us—everything. I will be good, I promise you, but don't make him go.

SIR J. [*after a pause*]. I couldn't stand that. I'll do anything else, but he's got to go.

LADY B. So you'll do nothing to help me ?

SIR J. Yes I will, but I can't do that.

LADY B. You'll do nothing to stop him ?

SIR J. No !

LADY B. There you are. You come between me and everything. It isn't fair.

SIR J. I'd better get out and leave you to enjoy life a bit.

LADY B. That's simply cruel, and you know it. [*She walks away and there is a long pause.*] I think I'll go to bed. I've a splitting headache.

SIR J. So will I, I think. Will you ring for Sutton—and Leavitt ?

LADY BRABAZON *does so, and then glances at SIR JAMES, sitting very lonely in his chair. She goes quickly over to him and puts her hand on his shoulder.*

LADY B. I'm sorry, Jim. Don't let's quarrel.

SIR J. [*he takes her hand and kisses it*]. That's all right, Phil. We'll find some way to help you.

Enter SUTTON from the dressing-room with a basket of logs. He puts them down by the fire.

[To SUTTON] I'm going to bed now, Sutton

SUTTON *goes to help him out of his chair as DOCTOR LEAVITT enters*

Just a moment I want to speak to the Doctor He'll call you

SUTTON Very good, Sir James

Exit SUTTON to the dressing-room

SIR J Doctor, you've got to make me sleep to-night That stuff doesn't act at all these days

DOCTOR I'll do my best, Sir James, I promise you that.

LADY B Can't you give him something different?

DOCTOR. I think after one bad night he'll be more inclined to sleep, in any case

SIR J One bad night! I've had scores

LADY B Surely there's something that's certain, isn't there?

DOCTOR It's a matter of the dose, Lady Brabazon. One has to be careful

SIR J Well, don't be too careful, that's all I ask.

DOCTOR I'll give you your usual draught before I leave you And I will leave you a similar dose in a glass by your side If you're still awake in four hours' time you can take that

SIR J Four hours! Well, I must be thankful for small mercies, I suppose What's it going to be?

DOCTOR Paraldehyde, same as before

SIR J Filthy stuff! and burns like the devil!

DOCTOR. That's why we dilute it If you took it neat you'd know about it!

SIR J Oh, well! let's hope it works

DOCTOR. You'll probably wake up in the morning and find you've never touched it

LADY B. I hope he does.

SIR J. I'd like to have a small bet on it, anyway. Well, off you go, Phil. [*Kisses LADY BRABAZON'S hand and propels himself into the dressing-room.*]

Exit SIR JAMES. The DOCTOR opens door to him and then, closing it, comes back to LADY BRABAZON.

DOCTOR. I do hope he will sleep.

LADY B. Yes.

DOCTOR. I think he will. But these cases are always difficult.

Enter NURSE OSBORNE. She begins to arrange things in the room a little, and listens with varying intensity throughout the ensuing conversation.

LADY B. You mean these pains he has ?

DOCTOR. Yes. I'm giving him the very largest dose I dare now, compatible with safety.

LADY B. Couldn't you give him morphia, or something ?

DOCTOR. I shouldn't like to.

LADY B. But I thought that was what doctors always gave to deaden pain ?

DOCTOR. When it's only needed for a short time—yes. But Sir James may live for many years, and people get a craving for it, you know.

LADY B. Is there no hope of him ever getting well ?

DOCTOR. From the injury ? I'm afraid not—no.

LADY B. What will happen then ? Will it—will it kill him, I mean, in time ?

DOCTOR [*reassuringly*]. Oh, dear no. Sir James has a splendid constitution, and with proper care he may live for many years. You need have no anxiety whatever about that.

LADY B. And he will be in pain always—and helpless—like this ?

DOCTOR I'm afraid that is so, poor fellow

LADY B [*half to herself*] So it will go on—and on—for years

There is a pause, the Doctor not knowing what to say

I think if I were he I'd sooner be free from pain, even if I never woke up again

DOCTOR Well—perhaps that's true.

LADY B It seems terrible to keep people alive—and in pain—when there's no hope

DOCTOR That's perfectly true in many cases But my profession has no choice in the matter All we can do is to try to make things as easy for them as possible.

LADY B Yes, I suppose that's all we can do Oh, well [*holding out her hand*], he's in good hands, I'm sure

DOCTOR It's very kind of you to say so Good-night

LADY B Good-night, Nurse

NURSE Good-night, Lady Brabazon.

Exit LADY BRABAZON The Doctor holds door open for her and then, having closed it, turns back to
NURSE OSBORNE

DOCTOR Poor Lady Brabazon! I'm terribly sorry for both of them She's obviously been crying

NURSE You're a strange mixture, Andrew, aren't you?

DOCTOR Why?

NURSE You're so kind in some ways, and so terribly hard in others

DOCTOR. I'm not hard

NURSE You're as hard as iron—to me

DOCTOR. Don't say that, Grace I'm not hard a bit I want you to be happy—really I do

NURSE I know You'd like everybody to be happy, wouldn't you?

DOCTOR. Of course I would.

NURSE. But your way of getting happiness is to run away from trouble. That's not my way. You've got to fight for your happiness in this world. I know that now, and I mean to fight for mine.

DOCTOR. Well, never mind, it'll all come right in the end, you'll see.

NURSE. Only if I make it.

DOCTOR. Of course, if you're going to talk like that it's simply hopeless. [*He turns away pceevishly.*]

NURSE. I must see you to-night, Andrew, before I can sleep.

DOCTOR. Whatever for ?

NURSE. You said this morning that you'd marry me as soon as Sir James died.

DOCTOR. That's right—then we can do it decently.

NURSE. We can never do it "decently" now.

DOCTOR. Oh, you make me tired.

NURSE. And you told me that wouldn't be long, didn't you ?

DOCTOR. Of course ; it can't be long.

NURSE. But just now you told Lady Brabazon he might live for years.

DOCTOR. Well, naturally—to cheer her up.

NURSE. That's it—you say one thing to one person, and another to another—just as it suits you. I can't believe a word you say. I believe you're just putting me off so that you can get out of marrying me altogether.

DOCTOR. You know as well as I do that if anything went wrong he might be dead in a week.

NURSE [*losing control at last*]. So you say ; but he's not dead yet, Andrew, and we've got to do something now.

As the DOCTOR finishes speaking SUTTON enters from the sitting-room. He comes in quietly as usual, and overhears NURSE OSBORNE'S outburst. When she has finished, he speaks.

SUTTON Sir James is quite ready now, sir.

The DOCTOR and NURSE turn with a start.

DOCTOR Hello, Sutton, you gave me quite a start. I didn't hear you come in.

SUTTON [*very impassively*] Nurse Osborne complains that I am noisy, sir. [*He crosses again to sitting-room door and exits SUTTON.*]

As the door closes they stand staring fearfully and questioningly at each other. The curtain descends to show a lapse of four hours.

ACT II.

SCENE II.

SCENE.—Same as Scene I.

When the curtain rises stage is in darkness. The beam from the lighthouse swings at regular intervals across the room, making it light as noon-day for a moment and darker still by contrast as it goes.

SIR JAMES is in bed, and his tiny bedside lamp is lit ; throwing a very faint light down on to the bedside table on which it stands, and illuminating the other objects standing also upon it. Among these is the glass containing the second dose, covered with a coffee saucer.

Suddenly, as the beam of light crosses the room, the door of the sitting-room is seen silently to open, and a figure enters. In the recurring beam of the light this figure is seen to cross the room, keeping close to the wall as it does so, and draw near to the bed. It is a slender figure, apparently a woman's, but so hidden in a dark dressing-gown and scarf that the features are unrecognisable. It reaches the bed, pauses a second to reassure itself, and then stealthily reaches a hand out towards the bed-table. The hand removes the saucer, and then reaches forward again towards the glass ; this time it holds a bottle. It pours some of the contents of the bottle into the glass ; it is withdrawn and reappears holding the saucer. It trembles and the saucer falls with a clatter from the table to the floor. The figure in the light of the beam is seen to stand rigid. SIR JAMES'S voice is heard.

SIR J. Hello ! Is that you, Nurse ? What do you want ?

There is no answer, and SIR JAMES scrambles out of bed, still calling "Nurse!" and with his crutches he begins to follow the figure to the door. When he is a few feet from the bed, the lighthouse beam swings across and picks up the figure just as it is going out of the door into the sitting-room.

Still calling "Nurse!" SIR JAMES follows, and then, as the figure has evidently gone out of the sitting-room by the time he reaches the door, he returns, switching on the lights from the doorway as he does so. He is evidently puzzled and then, with a gesture of one dismissing some unimportant thing from his mind, he walks to the window and looks out for a while. He looks at the clock, yawns, picks up a book and puts it down, and finally decides to take his draught. He does so, and almost at once he knows that something is amiss. He reels, holds on to the table and has great difficulty in standing. He stares at the door as he realises he has been poisoned, and by the person who has just gone out of the door. He tries to call out, but his voice is strangled and hoarse. Then he tries to get across the room to the bell, but his giddiness overcomes him and he falls, his two crutches flying away from him. He gropes for them again, but cannot get on to his feet even when he has them. He then drags himself laboriously to the bell-cord, but when he gets to it he finds he cannot reach high enough to press it. Here he despairs for a moment, and sits huddled on the floor trying to take stock of his situation. He seems to make up his mind to some decision, and with tremendous effort drags himself to his desk, reaches up and draws down some paper and envelopes and a pencil, and scrawls a letter. He seals and addresses the envelope, puts this in yet another envelope, and addresses this last as well. He has just control enough to finish his task when he sinks with his back against the wall with the beam of light still sweeping over him at intervals, as the waves of insensibility close over his brain.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*The sitting-room. The room has obviously not been touched since the night before. The ashes of a dead fire are still in the grate. The blinds are drawn, and the room is lit by the grey light of the sun filtering through them.*

TIME.—*Next morning.*

On rise of curtain the DOCTOR and NURSE OSBORNE are alone in the room. She is standing watching him as he paces nervously up and down.

DOCTOR. It'll be a lesson to me, anyway. I'll never leave a sedative with a patient again as long as I live. They'll have to have a night nurse, whether they like it or not.

NURSE. You think he took it too soon?

DOCTOR. Probably got up, half asleep, and never looked at his watch. It's simply asking for trouble.

NURSE. Then he died of heart failure, really?

DOCTOR. I'm damned if I know what he died of. His heart was all right. I can't understand it.

NURSE. What are you putting in your certificate, then?

DOCTOR. That's the trouble. I don't see how I can give them a certificate.

NURSE. You mustn't have an inquest.

DOCTOR. All depends on this fellow Meadows. He's their solicitor. If he likes I'll make up something for them.

NURSE. But, Andrew, you must. It would hurt you dreadfully.

DOCTOR. They can't blame me It was his own fault—he wouldn't have a night nurse

NURSE I know, but afterwards? You must give a certificate to protect yourself

DOCTOR Protect myself? What do you mean?

NURSE Well, it's sure to be talked about If people thought you'd been careless—whether it was true or not, it might injure your whole career

DOCTOR [*after a pause, looking very suspiciously at her*]. Look here, Grace, about those doses last night; are you sure they were all right?

NURSE Of course they were—what do you mean?

DOCTOR That second dose wasn't, at any rate There's a drop or two left in the glass still It's simply neat paraldehyde—not diluted at all

NURSE Nonsense!

DOCTOR I tell you it is You can't mistake it. It burns like the devil I don't know how he swallowed it

NURSE I don't believe it [*She moves towards the bedroom*] I'll go and try it myself

DOCTOR [*meaningly*] It's all right now. You needn't bother

The NURSE stops and looks at him

It's diluted now I saw to that I just wondered, that's all.

NURSE You wondered?

DOCTOR Oh, well, it doesn't matter

NURSE But it does matter If you think I made a mistake, why not say so straight out

DOCTOR You were in a damned funny mood last night, Grace; and said some damned funny things, too Perhaps you don't remember them?

NURSE I don't know what you're talking about.

DOCTOR. Don't you? Then why are you so scared about an inquest?

NURSE. I'm not scared at all. But I've told you why I don't want one.

DOCTOR. You're sure it's only me you're thinking about?

NURSE. Of course it is.

DOCTOR. Well, I wish I'd poured those doses out myself, that's all.

NURSE OSBORNE *looks him straight in the eyes for a second and then turns away.*

NURSE. You're mad!

DOCTOR. Anyway, there'll be no inquest if I can stop it. Question is, can I?

NURSE. You can give a certificate if you want to.

DOCTOR. It's not so easy. If this solicitor fellow starts nosing around I'll have to answer him.

NURSE. Answer him, then.

DOCTOR. How? I tell you the whole thing beats me. I simply can't explain it.

NURSE. Well, I've warned you. If you don't take care you'll regret it.

Enter SUTTON from hall.

SUTTON. Mr. Meadows is here, sir.

DOCTOR. Oh, is he? Where?

SUTTON. In the M . . . in there, sir. [*Pointing to bedroom.*] He would like to see you immediately.

DOCTOR. All right. I'll come. [*To NURSE*] Now for it.

As DOCTOR is preceding SUTTON to door into hall they meet LADY BRABAZON entering. She is dressed in a loose black wrapper, and is very pale, but self-contained.

LADY B. I want to speak to you, Sutton, for a minute.

SUTTON Yes, my lady.

LADY B Nurse, would you mind . . . ?

NURSE Of course

NURSE *follows* DOCTOR.

LADY B Sutton, I want to ask you, I . . . [*She cannot go on*]

SUTTON [*going nearer to her*] I'm sure, my lady, this must have been a terrible shock We're all very upset, my lady, I'm sure

LADY B I know, Sutton, I know I want you to help me. It's about that letter you found this morning—in there

SUTTON I gave it to the Major, my lady. It was addressed to him

LADY B He's just told me Have you spoken to anyone else about it yet—about finding it, I mean ?

SUTTON No, my lady I have mentioned it to no one

LADY B We're very anxious—both Major Hyde and I—that no one should know about it—not even Mr Meadows You see, Sutton—I know I can confide in you—it contains some private business, something concerning your master which I am sure he wouldn't have wanted anyone else to know You see what I mean ?

SUTTON Of course, my lady, I shall certainly not mention it

LADY B Thank you, Sutton I know you wouldn't wish to do anything which might injure my husband

SUTTON I certainly would not, my lady

LADY B I'm very grateful I hope I can repay you somehow

SUTTON I want no payment, my lady, I was very attached to the poor master

LADY B I know you were, and he knew it I only

meant that I hope you will stay on with me and give me that loyalty, too. I shall need all my friends now, Sutton.

SUTTON. You're very kind, my lady. I shall be very glad to stay on, and do my best as you say.

Enter MAJOR HYDE from the bedroom. He has obviously got straight up from bed, and is in flannel trousers and a scarf. He goes up to LADY BRABAZON, takes her arm in his hand and draws her near to him in a quite natural gesture of sympathy.

MAJOR. Did you get Mr. Meadows?

SUTTON. Yes, sir. He's here now, with the Doctor.

MAJOR. Good! Tell him I'll come in a minute.

SUTTON. Very good, sir.

Exit SUTTON.

MAJOR. Where's Nurse Osborne?

LADY B. Outside somewhere, I think.

MAJOR. I told her to get you some tea. Have you had it?

LADY B. I couldn't, Richard, it would choke me.

MAJOR [*drawing her to a chair*]. My poor Phil, this must be awful for you. As soon as Meadows has gone you must go and lie down.

LADY B. What does Dr. Leavitt say?

MAJOR. He can't explain it at all. He's sure his doses were all right.

LADY B. He did warn me—only last night—that there was a risk.

MAJOR. He's wondering if Jim had anything else—some tabloids or something of his own.

LADY B. I'm certain he hadn't.

MAJOR [*doubtfully*]. I should have said that, too, only . . .

LADY B. He mustn't suggest such a thing to Mr. Meadows.

MAJOR. He says he can't give a certificate, and of course . . .

LADY B. But he must. I never heard of such a thing!

MAJOR. Well, you can trust Meadows; he'll do all he can. But I'm afraid there's only one explanation, Phil.

LADY B. What's that?

MAJOR. This letter Sutton gave me—that settles it, you know

LADY B. You mean it was . . . ?

MAJOR. All that was in it was an envelope addressed to Meadows—he's the coroner, you know—that can only mean one thing

LADY B. Oh, Richard, it's too dreadful. We can't let that come out. I couldn't bear it.

MAJOR. There'll have to be an enquiry. I'm afraid we must, Phil.

LADY B. You don't understand. You don't know what people will say. It's too cruel.

MAJOR. People will understand, Phil. They'll be sorry, that's all.

LADY B. Sorry for him, perhaps. But they'll say he was unhappy—that I neglected him, that I showed him he was a burden. They'll say I drove him to it. I can't stand it.

MAJOR. How could they? No one who saw you together . . .

LADY B. But who did? This last year we've seen no one together. Whenever people have seen me I was with you. That's why it's so awful. They'll say I left him alone to go with you. They may even hint things—about us. You know what people are!

MAJOR. Nobody would dare to hint anything of the kind.

LADY B. You don't know what people are like about here. I've lived here all my life—you must help me.

MAJOR. But even if you're right, what can I do, Phil? It's bound to come out.

LADY B. Not if you destroy that letter.

He starts to speak.

Then they'd think it was an accident. Dr. Leavitt thinks so now—why should anyone know the truth? Richard, please do. For my sake—as well as his.

MAJOR. We must think it over, Phil. It's not so simple as all that. There's Sutton—he's probably spoken about it already.

LADY B. I've seen Sutton—he's told no one—he'll say nothing, I know.

MAJOR. I don't like it, Phil.

LADY B. I'll take all the blame. But don't make it harder for me—than it is.

MAJOR [*after a pause*]. Well, I'll do as you ask. After all, it harms no one. But it's all wrong, Phil.

LADY B. You promise, Richard—you'll not fail me?

MAJOR. I give you my word I won't. God knows, I don't want to make things any worse.

LADY B. [*taking his hand in both hers and breaking down*]. You're very good to me, Richard. I don't know what I should do without you.

MAJOR. You poor child—your hands are like ice.

LADY B. I'm so wretched.

He puts an arm around her and she presses herself close to him.

Oh, yes, hold me like that—close, close. I feel safe now.

MAJOR. Of course, you're safe. Now don't worry, that's all over. I must go now to Meadows.

He leaves her, and, as he turns, MEADOWS enters with DOCTOR LEAVITT. MEADOWS is the typical country solicitor. He is tall, slim, wears a morning coat of

country cut, and is very spruce and erect. He has a thin face, wears pince-nez, and has obviously risen from the ranks. He is, throughout, divided between a desire to emphasise his own importance in so important a case and a desire to placate a rich and important client. He is, therefore, almost servile to LADY BARBAZON and the MAJOR, and quite aggressively inquisitorial with everyone else.

MEADOWS [*hurrying over solicitously*] My dear Lady Brabazon, this is a shocking business. I am most profoundly grieved.

LADY B. Yes, it's terrible.

MEADOWS [*pointing to his tucked check trousers*] You will forgive my dress, I am sure. I hurried over just as I was, or I would have put on something more suitable for the occasion.

LADY B. Oh, please! It was good of you to have come at all.

MEADOWS. It's a pleasure, I assure you—I mean, it's no trouble at all.

MAJOR. You've heard everything from Dr. Leavitt, I suppose?

MEADOWS. Er—yes. That is to say, I have heard his opinion.

DOCTOR. I told Mr. Meadows that Sir James undoubtedly died from heart failure, but I admit I can't understand it.

MEADOWS. You say there was nothing wrong with his heart?

DOCTOR. Nothing organic—no. Of course, he has been in poor health for some time.

LADY B. You told me last night, didn't you, that you were anxious?

DOCTOR. Yes, of course, I . . .

LADY B. [*to MEADOWS*] Dr. Leavitt has been most kind and skilful, I'm sure no one could have done more.

MEADOWS. I'm sure of that, but about these sleeping draughts, Doctor ; you say you think he took the second dose too soon ?

DOCTOR. I can only suppose so, but even so, as I told you, I shouldn't have thought it would have killed him.

MEADOWS. You mean they were safe doses ?

DOCTOR. Certainly. They were large doses, but no larger than he had had before.

MEADOWS. Dr. Leavitt thinks Sir James may have taken something else, in addition to these two doses. Have you ever known him do such a thing ?

LADY B. Never to my knowledge.

MAJOR. Nor to mine either.

MEADOWS. You kept these drugs in your own room, I suppose ?

DOCTOR. Well, Nurse had charge of the bottle, as a matter of fact. She made the doses up to my orders, of course.

MEADOWS. At any rate, Sir James had not access to it ?

DOCTOR. Oh, no—never.

MEADOWS. How did he seem last night, when you left him, I mean ?

DOCTOR. Just as usual. I had no cause for anxiety.

MEADOWS. And I suppose you were the last to see him ?

DOCTOR. Nurse saw him last, when she gave him his sleeping draught.

MEADOWS. Is she in the house now ?

DOCTOR. Oh, yes.

MEADOWS. I think I had better see her.

DOCTOR. I'll fetch her at once.

Exit DOCTOR.

MAJOR. If Dr. Leavitt cannot give a certificate, Mr.

MEADOWS, I hope you'll do your best to shield Lady Brabazon from——

MEADOWS Certainly, certainly There will be no publicity, I assure you

LADY B That's very kind of you

MEADOWS Not at all I shall be most careful of that, of course I propose to ask a few questions—quite formal ones, I assure you—and then when my clerk comes I can get the statements taken down on oath, and form my own conclusion I need scarcely say I have done that already.

Enter DOCTOR LEAVITT and NURSE OSBORNE

DOCTOR This is Nurse Osborne, Mr Meadows

MEADOWS Ah! You were the last person to see Sir James alive, were you not, Nurse?

NURSE Yes, sir I gave him his sleeping draught I am always the last to see him

MEADOWS What time was that?

NURSE About eleven o'clock

MEADOWS Quite Did he seem just as usual then, not depressed or anything, for instance?

NURSE Not at all He was reading when I left him

MEADOWS There was no night nurse, Dr Leavitt tells me?

NURSE No, sir Sir James did not wish to have one. He rang his bell if he wanted anything

MEADOWS Oh! So if he needed you he could get you?

NURSE Yes, sir I have frequently gone down when he needed something

MEADOWS But you did not come down last night?

NURSE No

MEADOWS Could he have rung last night without you hearing him, do you think?

NURSE No, I am certain he didn't.

MEADOWS. How can you be so certain ?

NURSE. I had a headache—I scarcely slept at all. If his bell had rung I should have been sure to hear it.

MEADOWS. Quite—that's perfectly clear. These two doses, now—you measure them out, I believe ?

NURSE. Yes, to Dr. Leavitt's orders.

MEADOWS. Where do you keep your supply of this drug ?

NURSE. In my bedroom.

MEADOWS. You have never left it in Sir James's room, by any chance ?

NURSE. Never.

MEADOWS. So that it would be quite impossible for Sir James to obtain possession of it—even for a moment ?

NURSE. Absolutely impossible.

MEADOWS. And the doses you measured out last night were exactly as ordered by the Doctor ?

NURSE. Yes.

MEADOWS. You are sure of that ? There was no possibility of any error, I mean ?

NURSE. None whatever. I am always most careful.

MEADOWS. Quite. Were you also the first to discover the—er—to find out what had happened ?

NURSE. No, that was Sutton.

MAJOR. Sir James's valet, Mr. Meadows.

MEADOWS. Quite. Might I see him next then, please ?

MAJOR. I'll ring for him now. [*He does so.*]

MEADOWS. How long have you been in attendance on Sir James, Nurse ?

NURSE. Two years.

MEADOWS. And you, Doctor ?

DOCTOR. The same time—we both came together.

MEADOWS You knew each other before, then ?

DOCTOR No, I mean we both came at the same time—when Sir James met with his accident

MEADOWS Quite I understand

Enter SUTTON

MAJOR Mr Meadows wishes to ask you a few questions, Sutton

SUTTON Yes, sir

MEADOWS You are Sir James's valet, I believe ?

SUTTON Yes, sir

MEADOWS And you were the first to find him this morning, were you not ?

SUTTON, Yes, sir

MEADOWS Quite Just tell me what happened

SUTTON I got up at my usual time, sir, and had my breakfast, and then I put the master's tea on his tray and came in here

MEADOWS What time was that ?

SUTTON Eight o'clock, sir.

MEADOWS Yes, go on

SUTTON Well, sir, when I came in here I was surprised to find Sir James sitting on the floor here

MEADOWS Yes ?

SUTTON I thought perhaps he had fallen asleep, sir He slept very badly, poor gentleman, and used to sit in here or walk about sometimes, for hours, I believe, sir

MEADOWS Quite

SUTTON I went up to him to tell him his tea was ready, and—well, then I knew, of course, sir.

MEADOWS I understand, and I suppose you roused the house ?

SUTTON Yes, sir ; I rang the bell for the Doctor and I

went and called the Major myself. I just caught him going out.

MAJOR. I was going down for a swim—I do that every morning.

MEADOWS. Quite; and then?

SUTTON. The Major told me to telephone over for you, sir—after he'd seen her ladyship.

MEADOWS. Quite. And now—I must ask this—quite formally, of course—[*In a low voice to SUTTON*] there were no signs of any struggle having taken place in the room or anything of that sort?

SUTTON. Oh, no, sir. The room was just as you saw it, sir, as a matter of fact.

MEADOWS. Quite. And, of course, you have never heard your late master speak of suicide or anything of that sort?

SUTTON. No, sir, indeed; never!

MEADOWS. Of course not. I think that is all I need from you, Sutton, thank you.

SUTTON *remains standing*.

SUTTON. There is one thing, sir, I feel I ought to mention. I'm sure my lady will excuse me . . . ?

LADY B. [*nervously*]. Of course, Sutton, what is it?

SUTTON. I don't like to speak of it, my lady, but I heard something yesterday which I don't understand. I didn't then—and I don't like it.

MEADOWS. What was it? Speak up, don't be afraid.

SUTTON. It was something Nurse Osborne said, sir—to the Doctor.

NURSE. Something I said?

DOCTOR. What do you mean, Sutton?

MEADOWS. I must ask you not to interrupt, please. And what was it you heard?

SUTTON [*hesitating*] I have no wish to make trouble, sir.

MEADOWS The best way to avoid trouble is to tell the truth

SUTTON *looks at MAJOR HYDE.*

MAJOR. Come on, Sutton—out with it.

SUTTON Well, sir—it was last night I had just finished helping Sir James to undress, and I came in here to tell the Doctor he was ready

MEADOWS Quite.

SUTTON The Doctor and Nurse Osborne were talking here at the time, and as I opened the door I heard Nurse Osborne say to the doctor, "But he isn't dead yet—and we've got to do something now"

DOCTOR But I say——

MEADOWS Dr Leavitt, please! [*To SUTTON*] You are sure of this? You must be very careful, you know.

SUTTON I am quite sure, sir

MEADOWS [*to LADY BRABAZON and MAJOR, almost apologetically*] I'm afraid I must go into this—I'm very sorry, but I must clear this up

MAJOR Of course—I'm sure Nurse Osborne can explain it.

DOCTOR. Of course she can explain it She simply——

MEADOWS Just a moment, please. [*To SUTTON*] Did you ask Nurse Osborne to whom she referred?

SUTTON I took no notice of it at the time, sir But now I wonder . . .

MEADOWS. Never mind what you wonder We can't go into that

DOCTOR. Mr Meadows—if you'll let me explain.

MEADOWS [*silencing him with a gesture*] You shall explain in a moment, Doctor, if you please. I wish to get this quite clear You realise, Sutton, what this means?

Let me put it to you in this way. It is apparently usual—at nights—for Nurse Osborne to be the last to see Sir James?

SUTTON. Yes, sir.

MEADOWS. And you, I presume, are usually the first to see him in the morning?

SUTTON. That is so, sir.

MEADOWS. And no one goes near him between those times?

SUTTON. Except Nurse Osborne, sir.

MEADOWS. Yes, we know that, but she did not see him last night. Now . . .

SUTTON. I beg your pardon, sir, but I believe she did!

NURSE. I did not, Sutton!

MEADOWS. Nurse Osborne has already told me that she did not. What makes you think that she did?

SUTTON. One of the maids saw her, sir—going downstairs.

NURSE and DOCTOR look quickly at each other, nervously.

MAJOR. Who told you this, Sutton?

SUTTON. Plummer, sir—the kitchenmaid. She wasn't well last night and was going to one of the other girls' room for something.

MEADOWS. And she tells you she saw Nurse Osborne?

SUTTON. She heard a door open, sir, on the landing below, and when she looked over the banisters she saw Nurse Osborne walking towards the stairs.

MEADOWS. What time was this?

SUTTON. She does not know, sir—but she says she'd been in bed some time—and Nurse Osborne was in her dressing-gown. I'll fetch her, sir, if you wish to . . .

MEADOWS stops him with a gesture.

DOCTOR Look here, Mr Meadows . . .

MEADOWS I can hear no more, Dr Leavitt

DOCTOR But I tell you . . .

MEADOWS And I tell you I cannot hear you

LADY B But why not, Mr Meadows ? Surely you will let Nurse Osborne explain ?

MEADOWS This is a very serious matter, Lady Brabazon ; I have no desire to make trouble, I assure you—for anyone, but I am afraid I can hear no more without a jury.

LADY B A jury ?

MEADOWS I am extremely sorry, but after what has been said—*[He looks appealingly at the Major]*—I am sure you agree with me that I have no alternative ?

MAJOR Of course, I know , but I'm sure Nurse Osborne could explain

LADY B Surely, Mr Meadows, you will give Nurse and Doctor Leavitt a chance before doing anything further ? That seems only fair to me

There is a pause, while MEADOWS fights his indecision

MEADOWS Very well then I am most anxious to spare you in any way I can Nurse Osborne, you hear what Sutton says he overheard you say yesterday to Dr Leavitt ?

NURSE Yes

MEADOWS Is it true that you used those words ?

NURSE Yes

MEADOWS I must warn you of the seriousness of what you are saying

NURSE I'm not afraid.

MEADOWS To whom were you referring when you said : " He is not dead yet " Who was he ?

NURSE OSBORNE is silent

You must answer me, please. Were you referring to your patient ?

NURSE OSBORNE *nods* and her "Yes" is almost inaudible.

And what was it Dr. Leavitt was to do under those circumstances ? Be very careful of your answer.

NURSE [*lifting her head and speaking boldly*]. Dr. Leavitt and I are engaged. I was referring to our marriage.

MEADOWS. Were you aware of that, Lady Brabazon ?

LADY B. I was not aware of it, but I am not at all surprised to hear it.

MEADOWS [*to NURSE*]. You say that what he was to do then was to fulfil his promise to marry you ?

NURSE. Yes.

MEADOWS. Was that what you understood her to mean, Dr. Leavitt ?

DOCTOR. Of course.

MEADOWS. But what had that to do with the fact of Sir James being alive ?

DOCTOR. I simply didn't want to leave my case, that's all.

MEADOWS. Would you have had to ?

DOCTOR. I thought so anyway.

MEADOWS [*to NURSE*]. Was Dr. Leavitt unwilling to fulfil his engagement—for any other reason, I mean ?

NURSE. He said he couldn't afford to just yet.

MEADOWS. Did he say when he might be able to afford to ? I warn you that I have a special reason for asking you that.

NURSE. He hopes to have saved enough soon to be able to marry.

MEADOWS. Nothing to do with Sir James ?

NURSE. Sir James had spoken of some money he had left him—yes.

MEADOWS I may say, as his solicitor, that that was so
How did you know of that, Dr Leavitt ?

DOCTOR. Sir James told me. There was no secret about it at all.

LADY B That is so, Mr Meadows My husband told them both last Christmas I know that for a fact

MEADOWS I see [To Doctor] So the bar to your marrying this lady was the state of your finances, Dr. Leavitt ?

DOCTOR. Yes, that, and not wishing to leave my patient.

MEADOWS [*drily*] And not wishing to leave your patient—yes Have you any private means, other than your fee, I mean ?

DOCTOR No

MEADOWS Have you any expectations—other than from Sir James ?

DOCTOR I have my qualification as a doctor ; I can always earn my living, if you mean that ?

MEADOWS That is not quite the same as a lump sum, though, is it ?

DOCTOR. Of course not—but . . .

MEADOWS If Sir James has left you enough money to buy a practice, that would undoubtedly make it easier for you to marry this young lady, would it not ?

DOCTOR If you put it like that—yes

MEADOWS I'm afraid we must put it like that You remember what her words were "He is not dead yet—we must do something now" Does not that strike you as a very strange thing to say ?

DOCTOR I don't think so I simply thought she meant that as I hadn't the money to buy a practice—as Sir James was still alive—I must do something about it—I must find work somewhere else

MEADOWS But why should she commence by saying :

"He is not dead yet?" That did not prevent you finding work elsewhere, did it?

DOCTOR. It didn't prevent me. It simply made it necessary—that's all.

MEADOWS. Did you seriously think that even if you married this young lady you would have to leave Sir James? All doctors are not unmarried, are they?—or all nurses either, I should imagine.

DOCTOR. Patients don't like their doctors and nurses to bring their private affairs into their work.

MEADOWS. And for that reason you kept even your engagement a secret?

DOCTOR. Yes.

MEADOWS [*to NURSE*]. Were you agreeable to this secrecy and this postponement of your marriage?

NURSE. I agreed—yes. I would have preferred it otherwise, of course.

MEADOWS [*to NURSE*]. When was the necessity for this delay to end?

NURSE *is silent.*

Was Sir James's death to end it?

DOCTOR. Look here, you've no right to say that.

MEADOWS [*very coldly*]. I am asking you both, Dr. Leavitt, to explain Nurse Osborne's words to you yesterday. So far you seem to be unable—or unwilling—to do so.

DOCTOR. There's no need to ask questions of that sort. We've told you already what she meant.

MEADOWS. That is what you wish me to believe?

DOCTOR. Of course it is. I can't help it if you don't.

MEADOWS. Then I agree with you that there is no need to ask any further questions—till we go into this matter more thoroughly elsewhere.

NURSE OSBORNE *is crying silently.* MAJOR

HYDE is whispering earnestly to LADY BRABAZON, and she is obviously disagreeing with him —

DOCTOR [*holy*] If you're suggesting . . . ?

MEADOWS. I am suggesting nothing. But people are not fools, Dr Leavitt. There is a direct conflict of evidence as to Nurse Osborne's movements last night, and though I shall not go into that now, it is a very grave matter, and for her sake I warn you to be silent. [*He turns to MAJOR HYDE*] You see, Major Hyde, the position in this I assumed—I'm sure we all assumed—that Sir James met his death by accident . . .

LADY B. Of course

MAJOR. Well ?

MEADOWS. This evidence we have just heard seems to point to the possibility of something different

NURSE OSBORNE slips to the ground in a faint and DOCTOR LEAVITT attends to her. MAJOR HYDE glances at LADY BRABAZON and starts forward

MAJOR. Look here, Meadows, in common fairness, I'm sure Lady Brabazon agrees

LADY B. Richard !

MEADOWS. I'm sorry, Major Hyde, I am quite determined to hear no more. I am trying to be fair to all parties.

MAJOR. But, Sir James . . .

MEADOWS. Please ! I shall empanel a jury at once, and they must form their own opinion of anything you wish to say. We shall go into it then thoroughly. I promise you that

DOCTOR LEAVITT has lifted NURSE, refusing STURTON's help, and is carrying her towards the door. Where are you going, Dr Leavitt ?

DOCTOR. I'm taking Nurse to her room. D'you want to stop me doing that ?

MEADOWS [*ignoring him*]. When you have done so, you will please come to me in Sir James's room. There are certain things I wish to do in your presence. You understand?

DOCTOR. I understand all right. I wish you did.

Exit DOCTOR with NURSE.

MEADOWS. Sutton!

SUTTON. Yes, sir?

MEADOWS. Please let me know immediately my clerk arrives.

SUTTON. Yes, sir.

Exit SUTTON.

MEADOWS. I am profoundly sorry for all this, Lady Brabazon. I hope you will believe that I am only doing my duty?

LADY B. It seems terrible, but I suppose you know best.

MEADOWS. I shall leave you now, if you will excuse me?

MAJOR. You're coming back?

MEADOWS. I will look in before I go, if I may? I shall not be long.

Exit MEADOWS.

MAJOR. Well, Phil, that settles it, I'm afraid.

LADY B. What do you mean?

MAJOR. That letter. We've got to give it up now.

LADY B. But you promised me you wouldn't.

MAJOR. I know, but this is different—you must see that?

LADY B. I don't see it at all. Nurse Osborne will explain everything easily.

MAJOR. No doubt. But juries are tricky things, Phil. If they know it was suicide, that's the end of it.

LADY B. How do you know that letter would prove it?

MAJOR It's addressed to the coroner

LADY B And what do you think he wrote to the coroner?

MAJOR God knows—but I can guess

LADY B Well?

MAJOR I should think he just says he was tired of living and meant to get out of it. What else?

LADY B I can think of other things

MAJOR I don't know what you mean

LADY B Suppose he'd found out—about us?

MAJOR You mean—good God! what a horrible idea!

LADY B He was terribly quick to see things, Richard. He was almost uncanny sometimes

MAJOR You mean he thought that you and I—I don't believe it

LADY BRABAZON is silent and looks at him steadily.

There was nothing for him to think, anyway

LADY B Wasn't there? We hid it from each other, but how do you know we hid it from him?

MAJOR I'm certain he didn't know

LADY B We can't be sure—that's what terrifies me. We simply can't be sure

MAJOR You think he'd seen through us?

LADY B I think that when we thought we were deceiving each other he knew the truth and thought we were just deceiving him.

MAJOR God! God! What an awful idea! And you think that's what's in his letter?

LADY B I'm terrified, Richard—just terrified

The MAJOR paces about in his agitation

MAJOR [pouting] But why should he—even supposing he thought anything—why should he say so afterwards?

LADY B. He wasn't himself—he may have written anything.

MAJOR. But he'd know it would hurt you ?

LADY B. Perhaps he thought I deserved to be hurt. Perhaps I do, Richard.

MAJOR. No, Phil, no.

LADY B. Perhaps he meant to punish me, to punish both of us ?

MAJOR. Well, if he did, that's that. We'll have to go through with it.

LADY B. What ?

MAJOR. If he wanted to punish us we've got to take what's coming. But we must clear this poor girl.

LADY B. You're not thinking of me ?

MAJOR. I'm thinking of her—we've got to, with this awful business hanging over her head.

LADY B. But she'll clear herself—she's sure to. Why make trouble that may last us all our lives ?

MAJOR. You can't compare the two. We've only a bit of scandal to face, even if he wrote what you think.

LADY B. He was mad when he wrote that letter ; people who do what he did can't know what they're doing. Perhaps he's sorry now that he did write it—and you mean to hold him to it.

MAJOR. If he is we don't know, we can't know, unless he comes back to say so. I wish to God he would come back, and let me explain.

LADY B. Hush ! You don't know what you're saying !

MAJOR. I do. But they can't come back. If they could, things like this couldn't happen.

LADY B. You're mad—mad. The stupidity—the folly of it ; you don't know what you're doing. Haven't we done enough harm, without you making more of it ?

MAJOR We've done too much already

LADY B Then why do more? Why give this letter to anyone? You pretend you loved him while he was alive—why drag his name and mine in the dirt now that he's dead? Why not destroy this letter and let us make amends?

MAJOR We've got to make amends to this girl first. If I'd thought this could have happened, I'd never have let you persuade me. As things are, we simply can't keep it back.

LADY B [*going to him and putting her arms round him*] Not even if I ask you, Richard, if I beseech you? [*She goes on her knees*] If I beg you—if you love me at all . . . ?

MAJOR We can't do it, Phil, it's impossible!

LADY B I couldn't bear it, Richard—the shame, the scandal, I couldn't look people in the face again. I couldn't live like that, I'd kill myself, I tell you.

MAJOR Don't talk like that, Phil. We've made our bed and we must lie on it. We can't hide behind Nurse Osborne.

LADY B But she didn't kill him, you fool—she didn't kill him.

MAJOR They don't know that. You can't tell—it's a ghastly thing to say, but to destroy this letter might hang her.

LADY B [*hysterically*] Her—her—her? You talk of her and what's right, and all the rest of it. You're mad, I think—a mad, blind fool! You say they might hang her if you destroy this letter—do you know what they'll do if you don't destroy it? Do you know what's in that letter? I do—I know—I've known all the time. Do you know whom they'll hang if you don't destroy it? Shall I tell you—shall I? It's me they'll hang—me! Oh, my God—me—me—me!

MAJOR Are you mad?

LADY B Mad? Yes—mad for you—for love. One is

mad when there's only one idea left in the whole world of thought. I was starving and he came between us. You loved me—and because he was your friend you said you had to go—only because he was your friend—that was the rock I broke against. That was the end—I knew . . .

MAJOR. Stop—don't go on, I tell you !

LADY B. People like I am must go on. I can't sit still and suffer. I'm like a man in some things—I want to get up and smash things—tear them out of my way—when they come between me—and everything. Last night I know I was mad. I seemed to be pushed—driven—goaded by something in me here. [*Striking her breast.*] It was you or him ! you or him ! One of you had to go. I lay in bed till I could stand it no longer. I couldn't cry—I was burning all over, and shivering with cold. I had some sleeping draught Dr. Leavitt gave me, long ago, when he was going on his holiday. I thought I'd take some—I had to sleep or go mad. I got up and found it—there was plenty left, and the next thing I knew I was standing in that room. And I knew what I had to do.

MAJOR. You ? You !

LADY B. I did it. It was so easy—so dreadfully easy. And it seemed to lift a weight off my mind just to do it.

MAJOR. You killed him—you can't mean it ?—Jim—your husband ?

LADY B. I did it for you, Richard. I've sold my soul for you. [*She throws herself at his feet.*]

MAJOR. You murdered him ! [*He takes her by the throat and shakes her in his fury.*] Damn you ! I wish to God I'd never set eyes on you. Damn you ! Damn you !

He flings her away from him, but she crawls back to his feet. He is panting—half sobbing—over the table.

LADY B. Richard, you can't say that—don't say that ! I loved you, I wanted you so—please, please believe me. I was mad—I hate myself—but don't you leave me—

please—please! You're all I've got in the world now—I've nothing left to live for!

MAJOR pushes her violently away

If I am to live, you must help me, Richard If I am to live, you must help me

He looks up

He knew I did it He saw me as I went out—he must have known

MAJOR Then that letter—if Meadows reads it—he'll know too

LADY B I trusted you—I only did it because of you—you won't let them hurt me, Richard?

MAJOR [*after a long pause*] I'll keep my mouth shut. But Meadows must see that letter

Her relief gives way to despair again

LADY B But my name is in it—don't you understand?

MAJOR [*his face now rigid, fanatical*] Jim gave it to me—it's a trust

LADY B A trust! My God! Haven't I trusted you, too—here, just now? Are you going to fail me?

MAJOR. I've done with you [*He gets to his feet and walks away*]

LADY BRABAZON *stares after him for a moment incredulously*

LADY B You've done with me? You dare to tell me that? You'd leave me now—give me up—leave me to bear everything?—when you're just as much to blame as I am

MAJOR. What do you mean? I'd nothing to do . .

LADY B You loved me—and told me so, didn't you? You kissed me, didn't you? Before you came I was quite prepared to go on with things as they were You changed all that You showed me all that I was missing—and then you said you must go

MAJOR. I had to go !

LADY B. You were lucky ! I had to stay ! You and your code, and your loyalty ! How about your loyalty to me ? It was you who started the whole thing, and then left me to bear it. It was your pride you were thinking of—both of you. I'd have done anything—anything at all—to make things possible for all of us. You know that—and so did he. But your beastly pride wouldn't let you. It isn't done ! We must be respectable ! That was all you thought about—both of you. If it spoiled my life—broke my heart—it didn't matter. You must run away and be respectable ! If that's your code I hate it. What I wanted to do would have hurt no one. And now . . . ! I may be to blame, but so are you, and so was he as well ! It was you and he, with your little tin gods, that drove me to do what I did !

MAJOR. Say what you like, I've done with you ! I hope to God I never set eyes on you again.

LADY BRABAZON *sinks down into a chair.*

I don't care what happens. And if Jim meant you to hang, I'll not prevent him. That letter goes to Meadows, if we both hang for it !

Enter MEADOWS. He sees he is intruding and begins to back out again.

MEADOWS. I beg your pardon, I was just going.

MAJOR [*taking letter out and holding it towards him*]. Meadows ! Before you go, you'd better take this—Sir James left it for you—last night.

MEADOWS [*taking it, puzzled*]. But why . . . ?

MAJOR. Never mind that—read it.

MEADOWS does so, and they both watch him in silence. He finishes, and then looks sternly at LADY BRABAZON and the MAJOR.

MEADOWS. This is terrible !

LADY B [*almost in a whisper*] What—what does it say?

MEADOWS It says—it is very disappointed—"I am dying—poison—I know it My wife—say I am sorry I am better out of the way, so I have killed myself—you understand I have killed myself—my wife—my love—forgive James Brabazon" So it was suicide My dear Lady Brabazon, this is a cruel shock to you But you have lost so much.

LADY B Yes, haven't I? I've lost . [*She begins to laugh, silently at first, and then louder and louder*]

The curtain comes down on her laughter.

CURTAIN